

THE HOUSE OF CRANE BUILDING (COMMERCIAL)
124 South Meridian Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-228

HABS
IND
49-IND,
42-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HABS
IND
49-IND
42-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE HOUSE OF CRANE
(Commercial Building)

HABS No. IN-228

Location: 124 South Meridian Street
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana.

USGS Indianapolis West, Indiana Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
16.572/100.4401/760

Significance: Built in 1866-67, the House of Crane Building was one of the original commercial structures erected to house wholesale businesses in Indianapolis' Wholesale District. Established during the Civil War, the Wholesale District served the city and central Indiana until after the Second World War as a source of wholesale products from clothing to groceries and cigars. The House of Crane is a contributing structure in the Indianapolis Union Station-Wholesale District, listed in The National Register of Historic Places on July 14, 1982.

Description: The House of Crane Building is a three-story brick commercial building facing South Meridian Street. The building is composed of three distinct sections. The tallest is the eastern portion, which is three stories in height. The northwest portion is two stories in height and the southwest portion is one story in height. The building footprint is 39 feet - 11 inches x 204 feet long. It occupies 40 feet off the south side of Lot 4 between Meridian Street and the alley to the west. It is bounded by the commercial building 122 South Meridian Street (HABS No. IN-227) to the north and a parking lot to the south.

The principal (east) facade is three stories tall. At the first floor are six equally spaced storefront openings with the entrance in the northern-most bay. The remaining openings are display windows with plate glass and wooden kickplates. The transoms of all six bays are glazed with Luxfer prism glass. At the second and third floors are six equally-spaced, round-arched windows with four-over-four double-hung wood-sash windows, stone sills and ornamented arched hoods. At the top of the wall is a wooden entablature with dentils, frieze and cornice. Limestone quoins define the northern and southern edges of the facade.

The House of Crane Building (Commercial Building)
HABS No. IN-228 (Page 2)

The south facade is of brick with no openings on its three-story eastern half. At the first floor of the western half are four openings that start approximately twelve feet from the west end with twelve feet between each. East of these is a service opening. All of the first floor openings are infilled with paired steel blinds on hinges. The second level of the west end is set back approximately 19 feet and divided into three bays. In the west bay there are no openings. In the center bay are two windows. In the east bay are three windows. All of these windows are metal-clad, pivoting and glazed with industrial wire glass.

The west elevation is two-part with a three-story elevation of the eastern half and the one and two-story elevations of the western half of the building. At the west wall of the east half of the building is a third floor facade with four equally spaced segmented-arched windows. At the second floor on the south half near this wall is another wall of wood construction with two windows. The west wall of the west half of the building is two bays wide. The north bay is two stories with two segmented-arched four-over-four windows at the second floor and two service entrances at the ground floor. The one-story south bay has a service opening infilled with wood. The three roofs consist of the western-sloped, built-up roof over the three-story eastern half, the western-sloped, built-up roof over the two-story northwestern portion and the southern-sloped built-up roof over the one-story southwestern portion. Two industrial skylights with wire-glass pierce the roof of the two story northwestern portion.

Although the interior was remodeled in 1978 for office use, some original and historical materials and surfaces dating from 1866-67 and circa 1916 are intact. The eastern half of the first floor exhibits stamped sheet metal ceilings. The art-glass and mahogany wood-paneled partitions and wainscoting are found in the northern portion of the eastern half. The humidor vault with storage shelves remains intact in the west end of the first floor. The second and third floors remain virtually unaltered from the nineteenth century, when they functioned as storage areas for the many and varied wholesale businesses that occupied the building. Brick walls, board floors and exposed ceiling joints are found in the third floor.

The House of Crane Building (Commercial Building)
HABS No. IN-228 (Page 3)

History:

The House of Crane Building was constructed by Edward Beck sometime between July 1866 and July 1868. Beck purchased the property in 1866 and entered into an agreement with the adjacent property owner to the south on July 27, 1866 to erect a "brick and masonry building" with the south wall serving as a party wall between the two parcels of land. Beck was a German immigrant and proprietor of the Crystal Palace, a saloon and restaurant. The first documented tenants of Beck's building were Rickard & Talbott, wholesalers of hats, caps and furs, and the J.C. Brinkmeyer & Co., wholesalers and distillers of bourbon and rye whiskeys. Both occupied the building in 1868 and remained several years, followed by a succession of clothing, shoes, coffee, grocery and hardware wholesalers. In 1898 the local wholesale grocery firm of Kothe, Wells and Bauer (established 1889) occupied the entire structure until the firm outgrew it and vacated in 1909. The wholesale Indianapolis Electric Supply Company occupied the north half of the building from 1911 to 1916. The cigar wholesaler, The House of Crane, occupied the southern half from 1911 until 1916, when it occupied the entire structure.

The House of Crane remodeled the interior and the storefronts, circa 1916, adding the art-glass and mahogany paneled partitions, the Luxfer glass storefront transoms and the humidor vault. The House of Crane remained the occupant of the building for nearly 70 years until October 17, 1978 when the architecture, planning, landscape architecture, and interior design firm of Browning, Day, Pollack, Associates purchased the building and renovated the interior for office use. The architectural firm occupied the structure until August 1987. Since the architectural firm's vacation the building has remained empty. The City of Indianapolis purchased the building on December 30, 1986.

Sources:

Bass Photograph #A-137, July 1907, Bass Photo Collection, Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis.

Centre Venture. "Building Descriptions of Circle Centre Mall," Indianapolis, Indiana, February 8, 1988, rev. July 15, 1988 (typewritten, unpublished).

Cumback, Will and J.B. Maynard, ed. Men of Progress-Indiana. Indianapolis: Indianapolis Sentinel Co., 1899.

Deed Books. Marion County Recorder's Office, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1866-1989.

Dunn, Jacob Piat. Greater Indianapolis. 2 Vols. Chicago:
Lewis Publishing Co., 1910.

Edwards' Annual Directory of the Inhabitants, etc. of the City
of Indianapolis. Indianapolis: Edwards & Boyd, 1867;
Charless Publishing Co., 1869.

Hutchinson's Indianapolis City Directory. Indianapolis:
Sentinel Steam Printing, 1870.

Hyman, Max R., ed. Handbook of Indianapolis, an Outline
History and Description of the Capital of Indiana.
Indianapolis: M. R. Hyman Co., 1897 & 1907.

Hyman, Max R., ed. Journal Handbook of Indianapolis.
Indianapolis: The Indianapolis Journal, 1902.

Indianapolis Star photograph, c.1945, Indiana Division,
Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

Land, J. E., ed. Industries of Indianapolis. Trade, Commerce
and Manufactures. Historical and Descriptive Review.
Indianapolis: J.E. Land, 1881.

Logan's Indianapolis Directory. Indianapolis: Logan & Co.,
1867 & 1868.

Polk, R.L. & Company. Indianapolis City Directory.
Indianapolis: R.L. Polk & Co., 1880 - 1987.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis,
Indiana. Vol.1, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914
and corrected to 1954.

Sanborn-Perris Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis,
Indiana. Vol.1, New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company,
1898 and corrected to 1913.

Stein, Theodore, Our Old School: Historical Sketch of the
German-English Independent School of Indianapolis.
Indianapolis: Cheltenham Press, 1913.

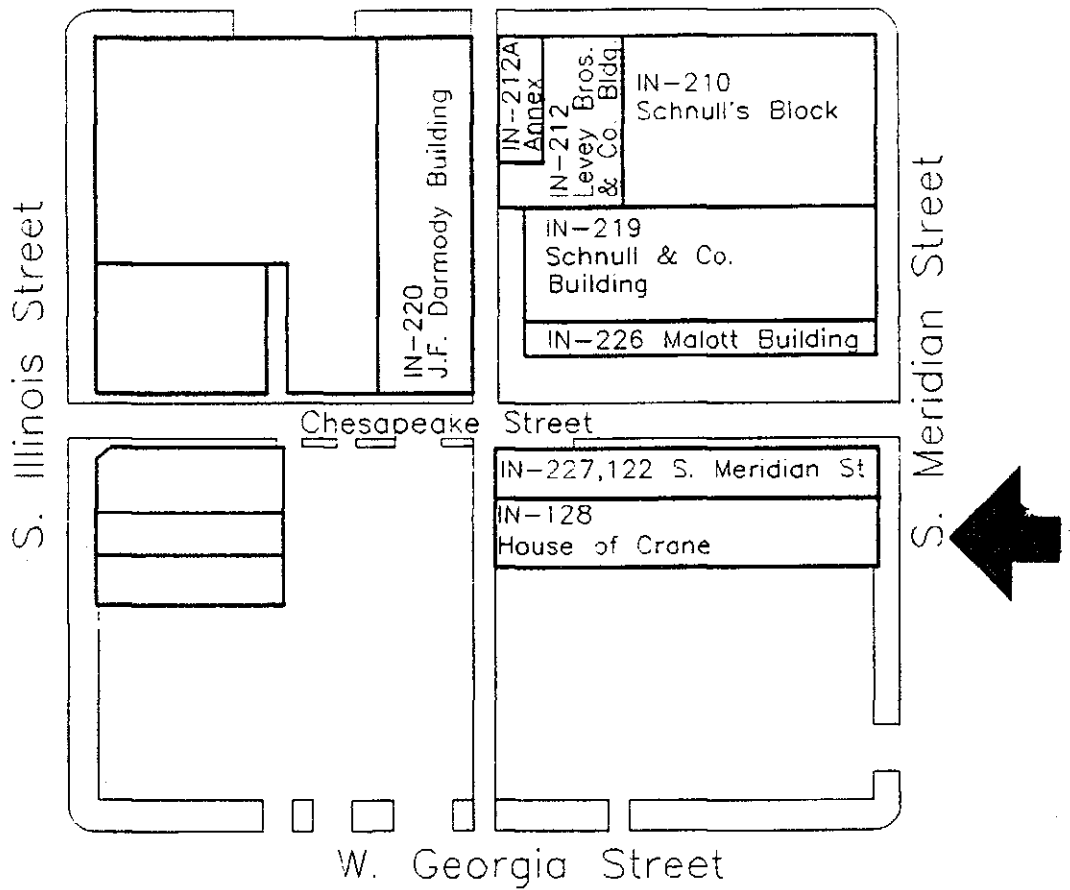
Swartz & Tedrow's Annual Indianapolis City Directory.
Indianapolis: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1874 & 1875.

Historian:

William L. Selm
Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
February 21, 1990

SITE PLAN

The House of Crane Building (Commercial Building)
 IABS No. IN-223 (Page 5)
 W. Maryland Street



INDIANAPOLIS, IN.
 CITY SQUARE 75



NORTH

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Indianapolis Star Photograph, c.1945.

The House of Crane Building is to the left identified by the arrow. Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

